

Q & A with City of Fresno CIO Carolyn Hogg

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With a shrinking budget and a staff cut by one-third since she started in the job five years ago, Carolyn Hogg, chief information officer for the city of Fresno, has prioritized collaboration and honesty in a department that Carolyn Hogg, CIO, City of Fresno

works on incorporating the role of mobile technology into government and covers such diverse areas of technology as the communication systems for the fire department and broadband access to increase agricultural production in San Joaquin Valley.

Describing her entrance into the field as a “fall” into technology, Hogg studied German and entered the banking industry, where she was exposed to COBOL programming language. Hogg says she started noticing errors in the program and then began work as an analyst, her first technology job.

Now, as CIO for the city of Fresno, Hogg says she prefers open communication to prevent a “Bay of Pigs” situation and encourages other professionals in the IT industry to “get out from behind their desks” and work with other IT professionals to share solutions and ideas.



What are some major projects or initiatives on which you are currently working?

· Collaboration efforts

My department’s top executive team and I are actively working with several public agencies including State of California, Fresno County, Fresno State University, San Joaquin Valley Regional Broadband Consortium and multiple departments within the Federal Government as part of the Strong Cities/Strong Communities (SC2) federal partnership to bring wireless broadband to the rural area. The San Joaquin Valley feeds 1/3 of the world with over 350 different crops. Global demands for the crops grown in the San Joaquin Valley are increasing as the population expands. With this technology, there is the potential to double our agricultural crop production thus potentially doubling the amount of revenue coming into the Fresno region. It will also greatly reduce energy usage for irrigation, having the potential to save the

equivalent amount of water in Lake Shasta annually by using water sensors. Broadband in the rural area will also support other interests in the rural community such as TeleHealth and Distance Learning.

· Government Mobility Solutions

Mobility is the fastest growing segment of technology. My department is working to bring mobile government to its residents and improve efficiencies of city operations. One project underway with our city's Streets Division allows staff in the field to take physical inventories of assets such as streetlights, using GPS in mobile devices to improve efficiencies of repairs (especially as a result from recent copper wire thefts). I participated in the first Government Mobility Conference held in Sacramento this year, serving on an executive panel.

Any recent success stories you would like to discuss?

· Municipal Information System Association of California (MISAC)

As an active member of the Municipal Information Association of California, (MISAC), my department collaborates and exchanges information with municipal agencies throughout California. Each year, MISAC evaluates cities in ten categories (budget, strategic planning, security, purchasing, governance, etc.) for their use of best practices, innovation, and efficiencies. We were awarded the MISAC Award for Excellence in Information Technology Practices for the second consecutive year.

· Regional Parks Community Based Organizations (CBOs) Support

As our city strives to maintain core services, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have stepped up to assist the City by maintaining critically needed social programs. My department supports the parks' computer labs to ensure vital technology education can continue to be provided by the CBOs to many underprivileged residents. As a result, young people have the opportunity to develop practical computer skills as well as a safe environment to complete their homework assignments.

· Payment Card Industry (PCI) Compliance

Identity theft has become one of the fastest rising crimes as technology advances. In order to provide the best protection possible, my department has met rigorous standards to be in compliance with the credit card industry. Citizens can be assured that their online transactions with the City are protected by the highest privacy requirements in the industry.

· Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) Grant

My department assisted the Fire Department with implementation of new technology for public safety radio services. The \$1,760,000 grant to fund a police and fire two-way radio system using advanced technology was the largest awarded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 2011. This system includes the ability to link communications between fire and police in the field providing them better safety during a crisis through unified communications. The new system serves the police needs of the City of Fresno and the fire needs of Fresno, Kerman, Biola and the areas of Fresno County between and around these cities.

Can you discuss any challenges you had to overcome?

A shrinking budget for the past three years has been the biggest challenge. My department staff was reduced by 1/3; from 75 positions down to 48. My PC replacement budget has been frozen for two budget cycles, so staff is very busy keeping their customers up and running. Department staff have really come together, supporting each other where the need of the day is. It's been during these challenging times that the walls between different job codes and titles have come down and we are actually working much more cohesively together in functional teams to provide exceptional support for our core services.

How many IT staffers work in your department? What is the size of your IT budget?

My department team has pared down to 48 today, compared to 75 when I began working with the City of Fresno five years ago. My proposed budget for FY13 is \$11.6 million (in FY07 it was \$15 million)

Who is on your leadership team? What is your approach or philosophy in leading the team?

Computer Services Manager, Bryon Horn, leads our network team and comprehensive fiber plan. Systems and Applications Manager, Eddie Hughes, oversees all enterprise wide software applications. Administration Manager, Gary Watahira, oversees the business side of our department as well as our customer service center for support needs. Mike Dottai, Regional Communications Manager, supports interoperability for our city's public safety radio systems.

I am so fortunate to have such a strong leadership team who work well together and set the example to staff. It is their interaction that persuades, inspires, and motivates our functional teams to partner and stay focused even during these challenging times. Our leadership team and I meet regularly as a group and one of the important things I've cultivated over the years is to get straight, honest answers. I don't want to experience "The Bay of Pigs" because someone was uncomfortable giving me certain information or a recommendation. We have developed trust and express openly and professionally any concerns, working together to come to an agreeable solution. Sometimes the final decision doesn't turn out as they hoped, but they have always supported some difficult decisions in the end. I fully trust my leadership team.

Can you describe the career path that led to you being the CIO of the City of Fresno?

I pretty much fell into the field of technology. I was a German major and Spanish/ Business (leaning towards Information Systems) minor with aspirations to go into international business. At the time, there was no degree in Computer Science. Being a foreign language major wasn't just learning how to speak the language. You studied the customs and cultures to know how to interact with people from different parts of the world to be successful with business transactions. For instance, working with the Latin community, it's considered rude to start the conversation by jumping right into a business transaction. Instead, you first ask about the family, how the vacation was, etc. then talk business. Germans, on the other hand, get right down to business very bluntly. (I can say that because my mom was born and raised in Berlin, Germany during WWII). I never was able to get into international business, but my first job after college was in the banking industry in the mid-1980's during the adjustable rate mortgage loan crisis when mortgage loans ballooned rising up to 18%. At that time, I learned to read COBOL and found errors in the actual software program. This is where my

technology career began and I promoted to an analyst for a banking service bureau supporting multiple savings and loan companies. During the banking shift in the 80's when all saving and loan institutions closed, I went into the healthcare field and became the CIO for a community hospital when the Y2K hysteria began and was there for 10 years. I've been the CIO for the City of Fresno for the past five years. With the technology shift going from mainframe computing to personal computing, my degree prepared me for the cultural shift in technology. I often say, IT departments traditionally were in the basement far removed from any kind of human interaction. Today, people carry their computers in their hands. People migrated into our closed-off technology world going from mainframes to client/server technology and now to the cloud environment. One of the biggest strengths to have in technology today is to understand the culture (both business and people) and to work together, then apply the best technology solution. Working with a group of farmers with technology involves a totally different interaction than working with doctors/nurses, educators, or police officers, etc.

What advice would you give to other CIOs?

Go for the vision and don't limit your imagination. Also, get out from behind your desk, make connections with other industries in your region, both in the private and public sector. Even though we may have different business functions, we all experience similar issues and networking, there is a great opportunity to share solutions and resources. I'm currently working on a project with our school district to share data among non-profits to help build our neighborhoods. For instance, when our Code Enforcement team is out addressing a code violation and sees a home is infested with vermin, sharing a database would allow the Housing Authority to have the information to correct the situation with the landlord, in addition to allowing the school district to be aware of the student's living conditions and possibly offer assistance. It's a partnership of cross agencies collaborating to better our community. For my female peer CIO's, I encourage you to use your voice. So often, we sit at the table and have such good information to share and keep it all to ourselves. Take a deep breath and speak.

What do you do in your off time?

I try to stay very balanced so I have many interests. I enjoy reading. My most recent favorite book is "The Art of Racing In The Rain." I love to travel. I'm a foodie so I like to cook and entertain, and my most recent off time interest is playing the "Draw Something" app. I'm hooked!